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ART. VI. *Specimens of Polish Poets ; with Notes and Observations on the Literature of Poland.* By JOHN BOWRING. London. 1827. 12mo. pp. 227.

THOUGH we noticed Mr Bowring's Servian translations in our last number, we cannot resist the temptation of bringing him again before our readers ; and we have more reasons for doing this than the mere wish to praise him. This however is, we confess, a strong one ; for the writer who can move gracefully under the restraints of a foreign idiom, and give us the spirit of foreign poets, without the second-hand air of translations, must possess a rare talent. We have even suspected, that Mr Bowring can do more than this ; that he can sometimes, like our Stuart, raise his portraits to the dignity of pictures, by throwing into them an expression of mind and character, which nature had neglected to give them. A man of such powers must do some violence to his own ambition, by condescending to the office of translator. It is true, he is repaid by admiration ; but it must be remembered, that he was obliged to create the taste, which he is now gratifying. We had before occasionally seen some of the wild flowers, which grew under the leaden skies of the north of Europe, and as there was known to be no lack of misery in those regions, it was supposed, of course, that there must be poetry also ; but no one had thought of a polar expedition to collect it, and we believe that Mr Bowring may claim the ground by the right of discovery, as well as successful cultivation. We remember well, that when he gave us his beautiful specimens from Russia, and from Servia (a country which might almost have been blotted from the map without our knowing it), we were almost as much taken by surprise, as by the ode, which Major Denham brought from the court of his colored majesty of Bornou.

But a better reason for noticing Mr Bowring is, that he is aiding the cause of philanthropy. By making the nations acquainted with each other's efforts in the department of imagination, he is creating in them a reciprocal interest, which at present nothing else could do. Commerce does not tend so much as might be expected, to remove the prejudices, which lead men to strife ; for they have not yet learned, that the gain of one nation is not necessarily loss to another. Science seems

to have put on a martial aspect; for who does not know what a tempest the name of *quadrant*, or *compound blow-pipe*, has awakened? But the works of imagination are welcomed every where, without jealousy, censorship, or suspicion. Nations seem to have a bowing rivalry with each other in doing homage to foreign genius. The Frenchman devours the novels of his natural enemy, and groans in admiration of Young; and England welcomes painters from America, without upbraiding them for their unnatural rebellion fifty years ago. These mutual courtesies augur well, and such sympathies may serve, in the absence of better, to bring men together, to give them common interests and pleasures, and to make them delight in these harmless displays of power, as the Greenlanders are said to fight out their quarrels, without savage meetings in the field of blood.

Certain grave men may think we attribute too much to the imagination; but truly, if national dissensions derive their strength from the imagination, we do not see why that power should not heal as well as destroy, nor why the same imagination of honor, which can muster thousands to danger, should not be able, if rightly directed, to keep them quiet at home. When a land is lighted up by the universal fire of poetic imagination in all its valleys and hills, it is no longer foreign, nor its people strangers to any other. We know and share their sentiments and feelings, and cannot feel at enmity with them. This may hereafter be the case with all the nations, and we think Mr Bowring is aiding to bring about the result, when this sword of the breast, if not beat quite into a ploughshare, shall at least be made an instrument for extending liberty, humanity, and happiness, and for breaking down the bars and boundaries, which now separate men from each other, as if their nature and real interests were not the same, as if man might have substantial reasons for not being at peace with man.

Perhaps we must hope more humbly than this; we trust, then, that by making the nations acquainted with each other's poetry, Mr Bowring is aiding the cause of freedom. Poetry naturally speaks the language of freedom, and it cannot, however *laureated*, lisp the courtly phrase without blushing; it is much more at home when bearing free sentiments from kingdom to kingdom, and stretching through them all that electric chain, from which, touch it in any part of the world, the same fire sparkles, and the same shock is given. No small portion of men feel that they are oppressed; some, like the Poles, by

tyrants without ; others, by tyrants within ; and they take courage when they hear their own strong feelings expressed in the languages of different lands. Certainly a mention, like that of Poland in "The Pleasures of Hope," must be reviving to a suffering people ; it gives them a pledge, that millions of hearts are on their side. Thus every Pole, who desires to be free, grows bold when he hears poets, if not politicians, say, that the second Holy Alliance is no better than the first ; that their pretence of putting down anarchy is the same, which Catharine made for dismembering Poland ; and that it is quite too much for their patience, to see a gallant nation destroyed by a profligate old woman, aided by an Austrian devotee, and a Prussian hero, which last name will cease to stand so high, when it pleases the world to open its eyes.

We have neither room nor materials, at present, for a history of Polish literature. The Poles (so called from *Pole*, a plain, which is a word descriptive of their soil) are the best descendants of the ancient Sarmatians. This was a name given to the vast and shifting population of northern Europe, which was continually rising with a swing, like that of the ocean, against the bounds of the Roman empire. We know nothing of their attempts at poetry, and are not disposed to lament the loss. If it be true, as was said of them, that their architecture was inferior to that of the beaver, we could not expect to find the sister arts in a very exalted state. But in later ages, the nation sustained a proud character ; it was called the rampart of the christian world ; the people were full of romantic daring, and exercised their courage against the Turks on one side, and the barbarous Russians on the other. A Polish army under Sobieski, drove the former from the gates of Vienna in 1683 ; and in the preceding century, Stephen Bathori bombarded the great Muscovite city of Moscow, as we are assured by Captain Dalgetty, though he was not present on that occasion. So late as the seventeenth century, a Czar was carried prisoner to Warsaw, and the son of a Polish king placed on the Russian throne, at least as firmly as Henry of England on that of France. As the poets are a race, who love to sun themselves in their country's glory, it might be expected that they would celebrate these memorable deeds ; but other circumstances were unfavorable to their existence. Possibly this very renown of the Poles for courage, prevented some nation from doing them the favor, for which England was indebted to the

Normans, who, in atonement for their intrusions, gave flexibility to her language, and romance to her poetical inspirations. The literature of Poland suffered under an invasion of another kind. When christianity was introduced, its teachers were generally foreigners. By their influence, the Latin was made the prevailing language, while the Polish became vulgar; and as they were the only writers, scarcely anything was published in the native tongue. This despotism lasted till the sixteenth century, when Rey of Naglowic, and Kochanowski, gave the language the ascendancy and form which it now retains. It by no means deserved to be thus neglected; Schaffarik compares its sounds to the vibrations of a guitar. Mr Bowring tells us, that it is the most polished of the Sclavonian dialects, but when written, the difficulty of accommodating twenty-four Latin letters to thirty-six Sclavonian sounds, gives it an uninviting aspect, and the accent always falling on the penultimate syllable, forms a stumblingblock in the way of versification.

But though its language was thus depressed, Poland was not behindhand in improvement. Kochanowski, of whose writings specimens are given, lived in the sixteenth century; and, excepting Chaucer, what distinguished name could England boast before that time? Wyatt and Surrey were poets, it is true; but no one would think of giving their works to a foreigner, among a few specimens of English poetry. In the sixteenth century, almost every considerable town in Poland had its printing press. The Zaluskan library, lately removed to Petersburg, contains more than twenty thousand works in this language alone; and the poets are found in an unbroken line, from the time of Sigismund Augustus, the patron of Kochanowski, down to the present day. We cannot help wishing, that the plan of placing Sir Philip Sidney on the throne of Poland, had been less a dream of romance. The character of the English Bayard was precisely fitted to charm such a people; it might possibly have added elegance to their literature, and grace to their stern virtues; and, if he could not have given a happier turn to the destiny of the nation, he would at least have been a magnificent subject for their heroes to imitate, and their bards to praise.

Some may think, that the misfortunes of a country are more quickening to poetry, than its triumphs; and it is sometimes true, that the fountains of inspiration, which run low in the prosperous summer of a nation, are filled to overflowing by

the storm. But time must first soften the painful recollections ; poets do not find their materials in the raw chiliness of the new-made grave, nor the blackness of the recent ruin. One of the living poets of Poland has appealed to the feelings of his countrymen with great power ; but they must be heart-sick, while they remember by what a series of low villany they were undone ; it would have been less humiliating to fall a sacrifice to the fame of some illustrious destroyer, than to sink under the plotting knavery of emperors and kings. We are glad to be informed, that misfortunes have not broken their literary spirit ; three universities, beside innumerable other literary institutions, are sending knowledge through the country, and may give them an intellectual existence when the outline of their territory shall be forgotten.

It is doubtful whether their present sovereigns, if they could avoid it, would allow them even this. The three millions, who were thrown into the hands of Austria by the partition, were not tortured with attempts to break down their national distinctions ; the Austrian sovereign oppressed them in a more characteristic way, by plunder and taxation. The Emperor went so far as to rob the churches of their gold and silver, and even to despoil of their ornaments the royal tombs at Cracow. This individual has not yet made any attempts to prevent the advance of knowledge ; but as his views with respect to literature are known to resemble those of Jack Cade, it cannot be expected to flourish under his administration. Nearly two millions were subjected to the Prussians, whose blows at the national existence were more direct ; they decreed that the German language should supersede the Polish ; and thus their despotism, though less rapacious, was more grating to the Poles, because more humbling to their pride. But the Prussians professed to respect property ; and when the statue of their king was erected in a Polish city, '*Sum cui*' was engraved on the pedestal ; an excellent rule, if not intended wholly for the benefit of others. But the effect of the Russian government on Poland is by far the most important ; it extends directly to a million and a half ; and three millions and a half are included in the Russian kingdom of Poland. The Russians have not harassed the Poles with new political institutions, but as Russian civilization is confined to the higher orders, like a Corinthian capital surmounting a shapeless block, or the laced hat of an African monarch exalted above no other

drapery than that of nature, it cannot be supposed, that the communication of the Poles with the brutal and ignorant officers and soldiery sent among them, will have any propitious effect on their intellectual character. Surely no man can wonder, that the Poles, ground to the dust by the various burdens of oppression, should have sprung with one heart, to the service of Napoleon. The moment there was a glimpse of hope, that he might restore their country, eighty thousand Poles engaged in his service; they were last in the disastrous retreat from Moscow, and clung to his broken fortunes when the rest of his allies had left him; for though he did not prove a benefactor, nor friend, he was their avenger; and therefore they cheered him onward in the 'blaze of his fame,' and mourned for him when he had fallen.

We must not look for anything very national in the specimens before us. It would be pleasant, certainly, to see a nation's character reflected in its poetry; but it is no more to be expected, than in that of individuals, where few will do the writer the kindness to believe, that his life is as pure as his song. The national poetry does not seem to depend much on the history and manners. The greater historical events will be duly commemorated, and the natural scenery will enter the service in the capacity of metaphor; but the stream of inspiration cannot retain all the images, that may have colored its waters as it flows, nor are poets, after all, the men most seriously affected by the condition of their country. In a rude age, like that of the Troubadours, when poetry is meant directly for the audience, and must charm at a first hearing, or not at all, poetry may give an exact idea of the manners and taste; but not so, when the general refinement requires more labor to please, and at the same time furnishes a supply of various materials for the poet, beside opening paths to fame, which do not require him to watch the attention of an audience, or flatter its vanity. Without pretending to give a summary character of Polish poetry, we should say that it was not remarkably national; but this may be explained by the fact, that the glory of Poland was on the wane before the age of inspiration began. It is plaintive and thoughtful, sometimes powerful and inspiring; less characteristic than the Servian, less imposing than the Russian; but by no means destitute of interest and beauty.

We give the following lines from the patriarch of their poets, Kochanowski, who died in 1584.

‘ Sweet sleep ! sure, man might learn to die from thee,
 Who dost unravel all death’s mystery ;
 Come spread thy balmy influence o’er my soul,
 And let it soar, beyond the world’s control,
 Up to the realms where morning has its birth,
 Down to the abyss whence darkness wraps the earth,
 Where time has piled its everlasting snows,
 Where parched by sunbeams not a fountain flows ;
 O let it count each bright and wandering star,
 Or chase its mazy pilgrimage afar ;
 Sit in the centre, while each circling sphere
 Pours its ærial music on the ear ;
 Drink of the o’erflowing cup of joy and peace,
 While the tired body sleeps in weariness ;
 No dreams to hang upon its mortal breath ;—
 And so—undying—let it taste of death.’ p. 55.

Zimorowicz lived in the polemical reign of Sigismund the Third, and died in 1629, at the early age of twenty-five ; literature was at that time neglected for monkish Latin, and considering the prevailing intellectual darkness and depravity of taste, we cannot help being struck with his writings. Apart from their simplicity and beauty, we may admire them as night-blooming flowers. The following song is finely expressive of the jealous fears and sorrows of a lover

‘ I saw thee from my casement high,
 And watched thy speaking countenance ;
 With silent step thou glidedst by,
 And didst not cast a hurried glance
 Upon my mean abode nor me.

Then misery smote me ;—but for Heaven
 I should have fallen scathed and dead,
 I blame thee not,—thou art forgiven ;
 I yet may hear thy gentle tread,
 When evening shall o’ermantle thee.

The evening came,—then mantling night ;
 I waited till the full moon towered
 High in the heaven.—My longing sight
 Perceived thee not ;—the damp mists lowered ;
 In vain I sought thee anxiously.

Didst thou upon some privileged leaf
 My name record, and to the wind
 Commit it,—bid it charm my grief,
 Bear some sweet influence to my mind,
 And set me from despairing free ?

Where are the strains of music now,—
 The song, the dance that morn and eve
 Were heard about my house,—when low
 And sweet thy voice was wont to heave
 Soft sighs and gentle thoughts for me.

'T is past, 't is past—and in my heart
 Is sorrow,—silence in my ear ;
 The vain world's wonted smiles depart ;
 Joy and the springtide of the year,
 Fond youth ! are scattered speedily.

Thou hast not said, Farewell ! No sleep
 Shall close my mourning eye—the night
 Is gloomy now ! Go, minstrel, weep !
 For I shall weep—and sorrow's blight,
 That scathes my heart, shall visit thee.' pp. 86, 87.

We select a few verses from another of his songs, that well represents the graceful importunity of love.

'It is not gold that I entreat,
 I would not have thy riches, sweet !
 I supplicate no gems from thee,
 I want no rings of brilliancy ;—
 But give me, give me, lovely maid !
 The rosemary wreath that crowns thy head.

When thou didst plant those flow'rets, thou
 Didst pledge the wreath to bind my brow ;—
 The wreath is woven ; now convey
 The wreath to me, as thou didst say ;
 Come, give me, give me, lovely maid !
 The rosemary wreath that crowns thy head.

'Twill fade ere long,—the summer sky
 Will blast its bloom—its flowers will die ;
 Though suns be cool, and winds should sleep,
 Soon autumn's chill will o'er it creep.
 Come, give me, give me, lovely maid !
 The rosemary wreath that crowns thy head.

O is it not a praise, a bliss,
 For such a trifling gift as this,—
 A few frail flowers that soon must die,
 To find a friend—eternally ?
 Then give me, give me, lovely maid !
 The rosemary wreath that crowns thy head.'

pp. 90, 92.

Sarbiewski is so well known, by his name Casimir, for his Latin poetry, that we pass to more modern writers. Of these, Niemcewicz is distinguished as a historian and tragedian, as well as poet. He is perhaps still remembered in some parts of this country, as the companion in exile of Kosciuszko. After his return from America, he published a *Life of Washington*. Mr Bowring has given some eloquent specimens of his prose writing. We could do no justice to his poetry by an extract, and we regret that the length of the specimens prevents us from inserting the whole of one of them. But we must hasten to Casimir Brodzinski, also a living poet, and a man of striking genius; whose works must have great power in his own land, where their tragic talent and perfect simplicity make them accessible and interesting to all, the humble as well as high, and the patriotic feeling, which bursts out everywhere, must, like the Swiss *Ranz des Vaches*, go to the hearts of men, who are enduring all the miseries of banishment, in their own country. Brodzinski's patriotism is not mere language, but a deep and burning passion; his works are not hung with black, like mourning-pieces, but the remembrance of his country's wrongs gives a solemn energy to every sentiment. We do not know whether he is old or young; possibly he may remember the short but brilliant existence of his country's freedom; he may have 'sat by its cradle, and followed it to the grave;' and though it would seem, that nothing less than a miracle can revive it, we doubt not, that if the changes of the world ever afford a gleam of hope, he will raise a trumpet-call to his countrymen, to which every heart will reply. The first specimen of his poetry alludes to the celebrated 'Polish Legion,' the remnant of Kosciuszko's army, which cut its way to Italy to join the French republican forces, and afterwards served so faithfully in the campaigns of Napoleon. 'The Legionist' is a dialogue between a young Polish soldier, and an old Italian, who welcomes him as a stranger. The careless desolation of the Pole, the sorrowful revenge that swallows up every other feeling, his indifference to the luxurious climate and the perfect and ruined monuments of art, are finely contrasted with the gentle courtesy and indolent epicureanism of the Italian, who is quite unable to comprehend a character so young and so determined. It closes thus;

' Nought to me
But the harsh clarion's clang is harmony;

That only can awake my country's sleep ;
 That let me hear when sinking in the deep
 Dull cave of long forgetfulness. If e'er
 Age should call back the blighted wanderer
 To his own home ; how sweet beneath the shade
 Of the pale lime-tree—on the green turf laid—
 To mingle with my country's sorrow, thought
 Of triumphs by her exiled children bought.
 Our cities are in ashes ; from the block
 Our youths ne'er chiseled gods ; yet on the rock
 By the way-side our heroes' tombs we see,
 Uttering their deeds to time and history.

THE ITALIAN.

Thou fair-haired youth ! these tones, so sad and stern,
 Become not life's gay spring. Let old men mourn,
 But thou, be joyful. Let thy country be
 In God's high hand—the King of kings is he ;
 But thou, the black-eyed, sweet-voiced maiden take,
 Forget thy griefs, thy gloomy cares forsake ;
 Round her thy children and thy home shall bloom,
 For all the world is love and virtue's *home*.

THE POLE.

Nay ! I have shed hot tears for her I love ;
 Nought but my country could our hearts remove.
 Whene'er I close my pilgrimage, I'll bear
 To my old sire my sword—my heart to her.
 One common land has bound us ;—this our vow,—
 "Freedom and unchanged faith,"—I swear it now !

He spoke—the Ukrainian *Dumas* met his ear ;
 On the dark hills the Polish ranks appear ;
 And like an arrow with his steed he sped,
 While Rome's old burgher wondering bent his head.'

pp. 180—182.

The next specimen, 'Wieslaw,' is decidedly the most interesting in the book. It gives us a picture of the Polish peasantry, who, judging from this, bear some resemblance to the Scotch in their general simplicity, and occasional shrewdness ; above all, in their religious feeling. The heroine is a maiden, who was lost to her parents, when Poland was laid waste, and was found and brought up in a distant village. An old peasant suspects that he has discovered her parentage, and though she left her home in very early childhood, he resolves to ascertain it by taking her to her native place, without however communicating his suspicions to her. The troubled recollections that dawn

upon her mind, in a region which she thinks she sees for the first time, remind us of Bertram at Ellangowan; the effect of the village bells is admirably described. She is sad and thoughtful during the journey, but as they come near the village,

‘What joy, what gladness lights Halina’s eye !
 Why talks she now so gay and sportively !
 They cross the planks—the brush-wood maze they thread,
 The sheep and shepherds play upon the mead ;
 She listened to the artless pipe ; her ear
 Appeared enchanted. Was it that her dear
 And now far dearer Wieslaw, had portrayed
 This scene when singing to the enamored maid ?

John watched her looks intensely.—Was the scene
 One where her early infant steps had been ?
 Now rose the village steeple to the view ;
 The vesper-bells pealed loudly o’er the dew ;
 They fell upon their knees in that sweet place ;
 The sun-set rays glanced on Halina’s face,
 And she looked like an angel. Every vein
 Thrilled with the awakened thoughts of youth again,
 And longings which could find no words. The bell
 Had burst the long-locked portals of the cell
 Of memory ; and mysterious visitings
 And melancholy joy, and shadowy things
 Flitted across her soul, and flushed her cheek
 Where tear-drops gathered. To a mountain peak
 They came ; the village burst upon their view,
 They saw the shepherds lead their cattle through
 The narrow bridge ; the ploughman gaily sped
 From labor’s cares to labor’s cheerful bed.
 The village like a garden reared its head,
 Where many a cottage-sheltering orchard spread ;
 The smoke rose ’midst the trees ; the village spire
 Towered meekly, yet in seeming reverence, higher
 Than the high trees. The yew-trees in their gloom
 Hung pensive over many a peasant’s tomb ;
 And still the bells were pealing, which had tolled
 O’er generations mouldering and enrolled
 In death’s long records. While they looked, old John
 Bent on his stick and said, “Look, maiden, on
 Our village ; doth it please thee ? Wieslaw’s cot
 Is nigh at hand.” She heard, but answered not ;
 Her looks were fixed upon one only spot ;—
 Her bosom heaved, her lips were dried, her eye
 Spoke the deep reverie’s intensity.

Remembrance of some joy had bound her soul ;
 She breathed not, but moved on ;—a cottage wall
 Soon caught her eye, and near, a cross appeared ;
 'Twas ivy-clad and crumbling ;—for 't was reared
 In the old time ;—a willow-tree—a sod,
 Where the gay children of the village trod
 On holidays, were there. She could no more ;
 She dropped o'erpowered upon the grassy floor,
 And cried, " O God ! O God !—'t was here, 't was here
 I lived ! Where is my mother ? Tell me, where ?
 If she be dead, I'll seek her grave, and weep
 My orphan soul away to rouse from sleep
 Her blessed form.—'T was here I played of old ;—
 'T was here I gathered flowers ; but I behold
 My mother's cot no longer,—thought flies o'er
 Its memory ;—but that cot exists no more." "

pp. 214—216.

This extract is a long one, but we trust that none of our readers will wish it shorter. The longer specimens are better than the lyrics for giving an idea of the poetry in general. We cannot help wishing, that Mr Bowring had acquainted us with his own sentiments, as to the various character of his originals ; the few extracts he affords may mislead us in our judgment of the whole ; at least they are not numerous enough to sustain a decided opinion. The metopes would not give us much idea of the Parthenon, unless we knew their place and proportion. Mr Bowring has little of the book-making propensity about him ; but it is not our business to find fault with what is generally a virtue. He is now employed, we understand, on a history of the literature of Bohemia, which is intended to embrace *Specimens of the Popular Songs of the Moravians, Slavonians, Bulgarians, and other Slavonic Races*. This work promises to be one of much interest. The author relies not on materials gathered at second hand. Warmed with a genuine enthusiasm, he travels in the countries themselves, and plucks his flowers fresh from their native stems. Translations of Finnish, Laplandish, and Esthonia poetry will follow in due time. We heartily wish him success in his perambulations amidst these novel fields of imaginative literature, which he has hitherto explored with so much credit to himself, and so much benefit to the reading world.
